



# Dare public school administrators build a new social order?

## Social justice and the possibly perilous politics of educational leadership

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to discuss how public school administrators with a social justice perspective have an obligation to permeate society beyond their schools and how they might address the perilous politics associated with advocating social change. Using George Counts' landmark 1932 speech, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* as the conceptual lenses, it examines the relevancy of Counts' words for contemporary school leaders and professors of educational administration.

**Design/methodology/approach** – While this article is historical in tone, the paper proposes pursuing a critical hermeneutic rather than a strictly historical approach.

**Findings** – The paper finds that there are similarities between the present-day call for social justice and the earlier Social Reconstructionist movement that Counts' manifesto sparked. Both movements have invited educators, and particularly the professoriate, to think more expansively when it comes to US public education, society at large, and the influence of educators in shaping a more democratic and just country. But Counts goes much further than most adherents of the current-day social justice movement. He stressed that educators must see themselves as political actors, who can shape their political environments through their teaching, as well as by participating in other venues.

**Practical implications** – For contemporary educational leaders, they may be working in far less hospitable settings than their twentieth-century predecessors. Administrators are under fierce accountability and fiscal pressures, while coping with a larger political environment that is polarized and fearful. And the internal environment of school administration favors a "managerial" approach. Consequently, embracing a social justice ethic invites a degree of risk-taking.

**Originality/value** – This paper examines the relevancy of Counts' words for contemporary school leaders and professors of educational administration and highlights implications for school leaders.

**Keywords** Social justice, Social change, Leadership, Politics

**Paper type** Conceptual paper



[...] we live in difficult and dangerous times – times when precedents lose their significance. If we are content to remain where all is safe and quiet and serene, we shall dedicate ourselves, as teachers have commonly done in the past, to a role of futility, if not positive social reaction. Neutrality with respect to the great issues that agitate society, while perhaps theoretically possible, is practically tantamount to giving support to the forces of conservatism [...]

To refuse to face the task of creating a vision of a future America immeasurably more just and noble and beautiful than the America of today is to evade the most crucial, difficult and important educational task (Counts, 1978, p. 51).

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Over the last 15 years, there has been a concerted effort by a growing number of professors of educational leadership to move research, discourse and eventually administrative practices toward more expansive notions of social justice. In fact, the research base has become increasingly normative, urging both researchers and practitioners to embrace more activist approaches to their respective professions (Larson and Murtadha, 2002). As one scholar recently observed, “we . . . are unafraid to take an openly ideological stance because we see social justice efforts as more important than traditional concerns” (Marshall, 2004, p. 4, internal citation omitted).

Yet, striking as they are, such efforts may grossly under-estimate the historic conservatism of public school administration in the US, which has largely focused on managerial issues (see, Blount, 1998; Callahan, 1962; Cuban, 1988; Marshall, 2004; Tyack and Hansot, 1982). For public school administrators, success has typically been defined as getting things done (managing paper flow, insuring students are orderly, teachers are teaching, staff members are paid, and the schools and school district are compliant with state and federal regulations, etc.). While leadership is important, the structure of a school favors managerialism – getting this done. School administrators who fail to attend to the management functions will not last long in their positions. However, school administrators who ignore the leadership aspects of their jobs generally survive. Consequently, this managerial imperative tends to support the educational, political, economic, and social status quo (Cuban, 1988).

Furthermore, educational administration is almost notorious for its use of police power. At times, public school administrators have been expected to enforce oppressive societal and legal norms in a governmental institution that ostensibly espouses democratic values (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Herr, 1999; Lugg, 2003; Nasaw, 1979; Rousmaniere, 1997). What this means in daily practice is that administrators have been charged with disciplining students and faculty into following proper social mores, and occasionally, punishing them (Foucault, 1979) using various sanctions from detention to expulsion (for students) and reprimand to job termination (for employees) (Lugg, 2003). This policing authority is both a historical legacy and a contemporary reality (Blount, 2003; Lugg, 2003). Occasionally, the use of police power coupled with the managerial imperative has led to the brutal enforcement of the status quo (Lugg, 2003).

The current authors explore these tensions between social justice, the managerial imperative, and police power by re-examining the work of an earlier social justice educator: George S. Counts. Counts is one of the most complex and controversial of US educational theorists and analysts. Largely influenced by both the Social Gospel and Prairie Progressivism of his Kansas youth (Keenan, 2002), his perspective was rooted in the economic understandings of Thorsten Veblen – not Karl Marx. During the 1920s, he traveled to the newly established Soviet Union, and even spoke favorably of its educational system (in 1930). However, later as president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Counts expelled communists from the union because of their totalitarianism (Button and Provenzo, 1983), and wrote a blistering denunciation of Stalin (Counts and Lodge, 1949). Not only was he a life-long unionist, but also a life member of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). In 1952, Counts was a candidate for the US Senate in New York on the Liberal Party’s slate. Given his political activism and membership in the ACLU, as well as his influential writings, Counts has been long vilified by political conservatives. In particular, his electrifying

work, *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order* has been repeatedly cited by those who believed he advocated for a Soviet-style system of education (see Hart, 1940; Rudd, 1948; Shoho *et al.*, 2005).

In comparing US society from the 1930s to the early twenty-first century, a few caveats are in order. While this article is historical in tone, in our exploration of Counts and his writings, we are pursuing a critical hermeneutic (see Best and Kellner, 1997) rather than a strictly historical approach. We acknowledge that in doing so we are confronted with the dangers of “presentism” or the desire to dust off some political artifact, carefully pruning away any ideologically inconvenient fact or event, to update for present-day utility (see Fischer, 1976). However, we believe a close examination of Counts – the man, the times in which he wrote, and his writings – can help inform contemporary researchers and leaders who wish to pursue socially just agendas. We argue that school administrators and educational researchers are confronting similar paradoxes and political perils to those Counts encountered if they embrace a social justice/social reconstructionist perspective to leading schools. By examining Counts’ work, contemporary school leaders may learn from one of the early pioneers of social justice and avoid some of the potential pitfalls when practicing social justice leadership.

Some of these present-day paradoxes involve questions of internal support from superiors to external support from the public to insure that all children can learn. Concurrently, there has been a chorus of rhetoric involving federal policies and legal mandates, which appear to contradict the role of schools in preparing children to better society. Inevitably, in any given school, there is a goal, mission or vision statement that states something like “Students will become productive and active citizens”. Unfortunately, this goal is rarely assessed and arguably, many schools are failing in this mission. As a result, what are the implications if school leaders were to reframe their perspective to focus on social justice and social reconstructionism, instead of focusing on high stakes testing exclusively? This manuscript addresses this and similar questions as to the impact of George Counts’ seminal work for today’s school leaders.

In 1932, Counts directed his challenge to US educators in general, but in this paper, we will specifically focus on the relevancy of Counts work for school leaders, particularly principals and superintendents. As Counts (1978, p. 2) wrote:

Any individual or group that would aspire to lead society must be ready to pay the costs of leadership: to accept responsibility, to suffer calumny, to surrender security, to risk both reputation and fortune. If this price, or some important part of it, is not being paid, then the chances are that the claim to leadership is fraudulent. Society is never redeemed without effort, struggle, and sacrifice. Authentic leaders are never found breathing that rarefied atmosphere lying above the dust and smoke of battle.

Notwithstanding Counts’s challenge to school leaders, this manuscript also explores the role and responsibilities that professors of educational leadership/administration have in daring to build a new social order. In recent years, a new wave of scholarship has advocated that scholars take a more proactive role in modeling the tenets of our espoused theories, in this case, social justice (Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Shoho *et al.*, 2005; Young and Lopez, 2005). However, espoused theories like social justice and social reconstructionism are meaningless and devoid of value and internalization for students unless professors of educational leadership put these theories to action (Shoho

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*et al.*, 2005). By examining these issues, we hope to foster an intellectual dialogue that expands our understandings of social justice, similar to what Counts accomplished in the 1930s.

A new social  
order?

Furthermore, as we explain later, the current political culture may well be even less supportive of discussions and movements towards social justice and social reconstructionism – most certainly a non-mainstream political view – than during Counts' hey-day: the Great Depression (see Knight Foundation, 2005; Kellner, 2002; MacMaster, 2004). As Counts argued in 1932, living the ideals embedded in theories of social justice in an environment that might well be hostile to these very ideals involves a certain degree of risk. However, this caution should not be a deterrent, but instead, a point of clarification. Meaningful societal change almost always involves an element of risk – otherwise, the changes we pursue would be trivial. We now turn to a brief overview of George Counts and social reconstructionism, followed by a discussion of the current embrace of social justice by some professors of educational administration. We conclude by offering some tentative lessons drawn from Counts and others who espoused social reconstructionism for contemporary adherents of social justice.

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### **Dare the schools build a new social order? – George Counts and social reconstructionism**

Prior to his 1932 Progressive Education Association address, George S. Counts, a professor at Teachers College, was best known for his sociological work studying secondary schools (Counts, 1922) and the composition of US school boards (Counts, 1927). His groundbreaking findings indicated that public schools functioned far removed from democratic ideals, selecting and sorting students for specified curricula along lines of race and class (Goodenow, 1975). Furthermore, schools tended to be dominated by elite controlled school boards who insured that they reproduced the inequitable status quo (Cremin, 1961; Tyack and Hansot, 1982). These inequities notwithstanding, his research also indicated that the US public school was rapidly expanding, particularly at the secondary level. Between 1920 and 1927, enrollment in public high schools ballooned from 2,199,000 pupils to roughly 4,000,000 students (Counts, 1928, p. 179). Viewed by Counts, the US public school system of the 1920s was marked by striking contradictions: The massive expansion in student population indicated that public education was wildly popular with the American populace and offered the promise of reducing – if not eliminating – social inequality. But at the same time, the public school was controlled by those who were more interested in maintaining the status quo and the grossly inequitable social order than in promoting social equality (Counts, 1928).

With the collapse of the global economy in 1929, followed by the political demise of several European countries (Hobsbawm, 1994; Kennedy, 1999), intellectuals confronted the very real possibility that the US political and social order would similarly crumble. Millions of Americans were destitute, out of work, ill-housed, and ill-fed, with their life savings blown to pieces by the winds of endless speculation by the banks, which had supposedly safe-guarded their depositors' interests. Likewise, public education confronted a daunting crisis with little-to-no tax revenues to support a system that was experiencing unprecedented high enrollment – thanks to the evaporation of child labor[1]. Many districts slashed teachers' salaries by 25-40 percent, and they still could not close the budgetary gaps (Judd, 1933). By December of 1932, the educational

situation was so dire that outgoing President Herbert Hoover issued a call for a Citizens' Conference on the Crisis in Education, which was promptly held in January of 1933 (Judd, 1933). Little was accomplished at this conference except for the acknowledgement that school districts across the US were facing draconian cutbacks in response to the national economic collapse.

This was the social reality confronting Counts as he presented his remarks to the Progressive Education Association's annual conference in 1932. He quickly made his central points: Progressive education, in practice, was of, by, and for, social and economic elites. While progressive educators claimed to take great interest in promoting the democratic welfare of all, they followed no theory of social welfare. He observed that those who sent their children to progressive schools:

Have no deep and abiding loyalties, possess no convictions for which they would sacrifice over-much, would find it hard to live without their customary material comforts, are rather insensitive to the accepted forms of social injustice, are content to play the role of interested spectator in the drama of human history, refuse to see reality in its harsher and more disagreeable forms, rarely move outside the pleasant circles of the class to which they belong and in the day of severe trial will follow the lead of the most powerful and respectable forces in society and at the same time find good reason for doing so. These people have shown themselves entirely incapable of dealing with any of the great crises of our time – war, prosperity or depression. At bottom they are romantic sentimentalists ... (Counts, 1978, pp. 5-6).

If progressive education was truly going to be politically progressive, it had to serve all children from all backgrounds, emancipating "itself from this class" (Counts, 1978, p. 7).

But Counts did not stop with his critique of progressive education, and in particular, its infatuation with child centered education. The Great Depression was proof that capitalism had failed, and failed badly. The old social/economic order was quite dead, which presented public schools and progressive educators, in particular, with their greatest challenge. As he observed, "If the schools are to be really effective, they must become centers for the building, and not merely for the contemplation, of our civilization" (Counts, 1978, p. 34). According to Counts, schools should not be political institutions that simply socialized children into accepting – if not embracing – the unjust status quo. Instead, educators should ensure that public schools would become models of democratic and socially just practices. Quite simply, public schools would become exemplars of American democracy. Consequently, out of the societal chaos and debris wrought by the Great Depression, public school teachers would reconstruct a new, better, and more just social order. Teachers and students would work for the further democratization of American society, including the move to a socialized economy, by tackling the social, economic and political issues of the day in their classrooms (Counts, 1978).

By far his most controversial proposal in *Dare the Schools* was his call for public school students to be politically indoctrinated by their teachers. According to Counts, "We should ... give to our children a vision of the possibilities which lie ahead and endeavor to enlist their loyalties and enthusiasms in the realization of this vision" (Counts, 1978, p. 34). Counts was unapologetic about his embrace of indoctrination, noting that public schools had long indoctrinated students by default, largely by reproducing the inequitable status quo. With teachers adopting a broader vision of what American society could be, students would be indoctrinated in promoting

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democratic ideals. This could be accomplished by restructuring schools into experimental crucibles where democratic ideals are not only taught, but practiced on a daily basis[2].

Counts' speech electrified the audience, which had expected a far blander rhetorical fare of tried and true progressive nostrums (Cremin, 1961). In addition, Count's speech and its subsequent publication, which garnered positive scholarly reviews at the time (see Gideonse, 1933; Hughes, 1932) ignited a more radical branch of progressive education – social reconstructionism. Social reconstructionism explicitly linked public educators to broader issues of economic justice and democracy. Like-minded theorists at Teachers College founded the journal *The Social Frontier*, in 1934, with Counts as the editor. The journal explicitly focused on issues confronting social reconstructionism, but the journal was always on fragile financial grounds. Counts remained as editor until 1937, and by 1939 it was taken over by the Progressive Education Association, which promptly changed the journal's title to *Frontiers of Democracy*. By 1943, thanks to the on-going war, weak sales, and unresolved expenses, the journal ceased publication (Cremin, 1959, 1961).

There were political and professional costs associated with espousing avowed revolutionary educational theories. Counts demurely described himself as a cross between a Jeffersonian Democrat and a Lincolnian Republican, stressing that his political orientation was rooted in the Kansas Social Gospel in which he was reared (Counts, 1978; Tyack and Hansot, 1982), "where God was a Methodist and a Republican" (see Keenan, 2002, p. 258). Nevertheless, from the mid-1930s onward, he was smeared by US conservatives and reactionaries as either being an actual Communist or a communist sympathizer (see Hart, 1940; Rudd, 1948, for two examples). Additionally, to his great surprise, his early writings earned the lasting antipathy of the American Legion (see Violas, 1971). He was repeatedly attacked in political gatherings, in newspaper letters to the editor, pamphlets, and opinion pieces (Bowers, 1970). Despite these adverse experiences, Counts insisted that educators not only get involved with politics, but that they lead political change.

Such consistent and intense pressure did cause Counts to eventually alter his writings. By 1952, and at the height of the Red Scare, employing numerous caveats and cautions, Counts discussed how the "Hebraic-Christian Ethic" had influenced American civilization, something he would have ignored in the 1920s and 1930s (see Bowers, 1970; Counts, 1952, pp. 220-231). Not that Counts scorned the influence of religion on American culture. On the contrary, it was central to his understandings of progressive social change (Keenan, 2002; Tyack and Hansot, 1982). But in the 1920s and 1930s he would not have devoted an entire book chapter to the virtues of a mythical common religious heritage for Americans[3]. Times had changed, and even the most ardent of social reconstructionists had to make the occasional nod to "Americanism". But it was only a very slight nod. In this same book Counts wrote, "We need an education that will reveal the deficiencies in our heritage and the dangers threatening the principle of equality in the contemporary world" (Counts, 1952, p. 335) – a statement unlikely to appease the American Legion. Counts (1922, 1927, 1946, 1952, 1962), further argued that schools were partly responsible for the continuance of social inequality and the maintenance of the existing power structure. Nevertheless, from his perspective, Counts (1946) felt schools had the potential to become the great equalizer to society by fostering social betterment. While Counts carefully edged away from his



more ardent embrace of social reconstructionism, he continued to be involved with progressive politics and causes. The same year that *Education and American Civilization* was published (1952), he ran for the US Senate in New York. But his explicit support of indoctrination via the public schools to build a new America social and political order was over. His educational writings would remain far more cautions than those of the 1930s or even late 1920s, thanks to the relentless attacks on his work.

Since Counts's time, the field of education has been relatively docile in terms of exerting political influence to meet the expansive challenge established in *Dare the School Build a New Social Order*? While organizations like the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have tried to exercise their political influence regarding state and national policy, the issues they have confronted have generally been far less ambitious than what George Counts envisioned. The two teachers' unions have largely focused their energies on teacher welfare issues. Their power has also been constrained by state labor laws, particularly in right-to-work states (i.e. anti-union states). This docile situation has been particularly true for other educational organizations as well, including the American Educational Research Association (formerly part of NEA), American Association of School Administrators (AASA – also formerly part of NEA), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and so forth. Why have these major educational organizations, which represent the vast majority of US educators (teachers, administrators, and professors), been so politically reticent? There are important contemporary and structural realities that need to be explored to tease out some plausible explanations. We now turn towards an examination of these realities.

### **Public education and life in the contemporary US**

For any aspiring educational leader who wishes to pursue a social justice path, a quick survey of the US political landscape would be helpful. As noted earlier, the US is arguably more divided, fearful, and politically polarized than at any time in recent history (Kellner, 2002; MacMaster, 2004; Shulman, 2003). This “hot” political climate at the macro level can be brought to a roiling boil at the local level, particularly if the issues in question involve justice and school children (Anyon, 2005; Brantlinger, 2003; Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). For school administrators with a social justice orientation, the job of leading schools where all children are valued (especially marginalized children whose voices are often silent or ignored) can be a perilous voyage full of obstacles and barriers to change (Larson and Murtadha, 2002; Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). It is through this journey that school leaders truly committed to social justice emerge. Less committed leaders will opt to remain in more peaceable political waters, blending into the environment of inequity and injustice to protect their job.

Not surprisingly, the US public schools have largely retained their ability to reproduce the inequitable social order – not build a new one (Anyon, 2005; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Brantlinger, 2003; Ford, 2004; Hogan, 1992; Mickelson, 2003). Contemporary public schools are marked by rigid ethnic, racial and class segregation, not only between schools, but also within schools (Anyon, 2005; Ford, 2004; Mickelson, 2003). Additionally, since the US finances much of its public schools

using regressive property and sales taxes, as well as state-wide lotteries, wealthy districts, which are overwhelmingly comprised of affluent white people, maintain huge, state-endorsed educational advantages over their less affluent peers (Anyon, 2005; Brantlinger, 2003; Mickelson, 2003)[4]. Contrary to the long-standing popular sentiment and sentimentalism (see Perkinson, 1995), these structural inequalities cannot be remedied by merely embracing more enlightened school-based administrative and pedagogical practices (Anyon, 1997, 2005; Brantlinger, 2003; Ryan, 2004).

The current educational landscape is also pock-marked by accountability pressures that are growing both in number and scope. With the implementation of the testing and accountability mandates set forth in the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), there are perverse incentives for administrators to act in profoundly unjust ways (see Ryan, 2004). According to legal scholar James Ryan:

Disadvantaged students tend to do worse on standardized tests than do their more affluent counterparts. An accountability system that rewards and punishes schools based on absolute achievement levels will thus reward relatively affluent schools and punish relatively poor ones. Moreover, given that minorities are disproportionately poor, and that all schools are held responsible for the performance of their minority and poor students, this accountability system will tend to punish those schools that are racially and economically diverse. All of this will make racial and socioeconomic integration even more difficult to achieve than it is already, and it will provide even more incentives for good teachers to choose relatively affluent schools (Ryan, 2004, pp. 934-5).

In other words, in a political environment that highly prizes high student test scores, it is in school administrators' best professional interests to bar the most difficult students to educate from their schools. And there is some initial evidence that this is happening across the US (see Nichols and Berliner, 2005). Such actions are sure to enhance the unjust status quo as testing pressures mount (Ryan, 2004).

Finally, the level of policing by school administrators is likely to increase thanks to the on-going and ill-defined "War on Terrorism" (Kellner, 2002). The US Patriot Act (2001) contains a little-discussed additional "policing" measure that directly affects all practicing school administrators. Passed shortly after the terror attacks of September 11th, the Patriot Act gives the US federal government broad investigatory powers and it includes a section concerning educational agencies. The Patriot Act covers educational institutions receiving direct federal aid (public schools) as well as those who receive indirect aid (private schools that are classified as charitable institutions under the US Tax Code). The Patriot Act amended the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA, 1974), which had given students and their parents (if the student is a legal minor) broad privacy rights concerning the disclosure of any student data (Rotenberg, 2002). Under the Patriot Act, with the approval of a federal magistrate, the Attorney General or his designee may obtain the records of any student – without either the student's or parents' knowledge – if these materials are deemed necessary for a terror investigation.

More ominously, this law limits judicial review or the right of the judiciary to intervene in meaningful ways. Consequently, the justification provided by the US government seeking specific, individual student data are basically immune from deep examination, scrutiny or challenge[5]. What this means for the everyday practice of public school administrators is if the federal government requests the finger paintings,



as well as all other educational and possible medical records (if any exist on-site), of a hypothetical kindergartner, Omar Habibi, because his great uncle was mistakenly placed on a “do-not-fly” list, not only does the administrator in question have to comply with this request and surrender Omar’s records, “they must not notify either Omar or his parents” (see Kreimer, 2004; Shulman, 2003).

The US government’s requirement that school administrators facilitate the collection of secret evidence on school children (whether they attend private or public schools) is perhaps the clearest example of the current political environment. Not only are long-standing racial and class inequities expanding (Anyon, 2005; Mickelson, 2003), the American political culture has been marked by a level of fear and secrecy not seen since the 1950s (Kreimer, 2004; MacMaster, 2004). Given the pressures for “accountability”, coupled with stark racial, class, and political divisions, and then painted with a patina of paranoia, it’s not surprising that many educational professionals and their associations have remained focused on addressing managerial issues. Historically, this is the most likely response – regardless of external pressure (Cuban, 1988). We now turn towards a re-examination of Counts in light of today’s realities, drawing possible implications before bringing this discussion to a close.

### **Implications for school leaders**

While there have been multiple calls over the last decade for educational leaders to ensure the well-being of all their students, very few have taken note of either historical models, or the environments in which these historic leaders operated. Both current authors have been struck by the similarities between the present-day call for social justice and the earlier Social Reconstructionist movement that Counts’ manifesto sparked. Both movements have invited educators, and particularly members of the professoriate, to think more expansively when it comes to US public education, society at large, and the influence of educators in shaping a more democratic and just country. But Counts goes much further than most adherents of the current-day social justice movement. He stressed that educators must see themselves as motivated political actors, who can take part in the shaping of their political environments through their teaching (Counts, 1978), as well as by participating in other venues.

For contemporary school leaders, the experiences of George Counts in attempting to use schools as a vehicle to drive social and political change illustrate the courage and vision needed to pursue this path. His legacy also indicates a certain flexibility, moving his more overt political activities outside of educational settings when the political environment grew increasingly hostile during the Red Scare of the late 1940s and 1950s (Keenan, 2002). While Counts never renounced his activism – nor did he shy away from it – he was a consummate student of sociology, history and culture. Consequently, during the Red Scare, he took his cues from the larger environment and refocused his energies where they would have the greatest degree of influence.

Ironically, for contemporary educational leaders, they may well be working in far less hospitable settings than their twentieth-century predecessors (Kellner, 2002; MacMaster, 2004; Shulman, 2003). Administrators are under fierce accountability and fiscal pressures, while coping with a larger political environment that is polarized and fearful. And the internal environment of school administration favors a “managerial” approach (Cuban, 1988). Consequently, embracing a social justice ethic invites a certain degree of risk-taking.

Additionally, depending on the dynamics of their localities, educational administrators may encounter fierce hostility from the broader public if they: challenge the fairness and pedagogical efficacy of curriculum tracking; support all student groups including a Gay-Straight Alliances; and provide broad material support for undocumented immigrants, to name but a few politically troublesome examples. Educational administrators must be prepared to pay professional consequences – and this includes dismissal – for the socially just policies and practices they pursue. Quite bluntly, embracing a social justice ethic is risky business for a school administrator.

For professors of educational leadership, Counts' challenge to build a new social order where equity and social justice prevail for all provides a moment for reflection on each individual's role in perpetuating social inequalities or fostering change where all reap the benefits of an education designed to build greater capacities for altruism and compassion. Additionally, many of us work at state institutions whose funding (and our salaries) comes from all segments of society, not merely from the political élites. Unlike our students, many of us are protected from the economic caprices of capitalist America – we have tenure. Quite simply, as professors, we work in highly privileged environments where we are unlikely to be “punished” for the various research paths we pursue. It is an environment that supposedly supports risk-taking. If we as professors are risk-adverse, ethically, we cannot expect our students to be risk-takers, particularly in the area of social justice. To advocate for social justice, while being risk-adverse in practice, is the worst sort of professional hypocrisy.

On the other hand, however, if we follow the example established by Counts, we are likely to have deeply meaningful, provocative, if occasionally, turbulent, careers. For those of us working “in the life of the mind”, this is a time-honored ideal. There are few stronger examples of working for social justice than Counts. It is a legacy well worth embracing.

## Notes

1. Child labor laws were haphazardly enforced in the US until the Great Depression, when both women and children were purged from the labor market to make room for unemployed men. The justification at the time was men were seen as typically the head of a family and needed the income to support that family. With children largely removed from the workforce, school enrollments across the US soared precisely at a time when funding evaporated.
2. This sentiment was the focus of a query by Supreme Court Justice William Brennan in the *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* (1969) decision: Should schools be a marketplace of ideas where students are exposed to numerous and diverse ideas or should schools inculcate students with the values of the local community? This has been a theme for the Court for nearly 40 years, with both liberal and conservative jurists weighing in. Generally, liberal jurists have support greater political speech, while conservative jurists have endorsed greater religious speech within the confines of a public school.
3. This is something religious historian, Sydney Ahlstrom (1972), makes abundantly clear in his massive, *A Religious History of the American People*.
4. State-wide lotteries, while politically popular, are extremely regressive way to fund public schools since the vast majority of individuals who “play the lottery” are poor. The distinction is thus: Poor people play the lottery, while wealthy people invest in the stock market. Not surprisingly, wealthy individuals tend to receive a better return on their dollars.

5. This would seem to violate the US Constitution's Fourth Amendment protection against "unreasonable search and seizure" by the government. But at present, there have been no court challenges, precisely because the evidence gathering is by secretive means (see Shulman, 2003).

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